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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3947
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9334
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6230
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4267
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3103
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9822
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3193
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0297
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2269
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0217
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6780
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4649
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1266
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001262

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: WATER-RELATED MILITARY ACTION CONTINUES
FOR FIFTH DAY

REF: A. COLOMBO 1246

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1235

Classified By: CDA JAMES F. ENTWISTLE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ground fighting in Sri Lanka's Eastern district of Batticaloa continued August 1 as Sri Lankan Army (SLA) forces attempted to gain control of an irrigation canal seized by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (reftels). Air strikes also reportedly occurred the night of July 31. The military spokesman said the death toll for the past 24 hours hit possibly 40 LTTE cadres and a total of 27 SLA forces, with 12 killed in the field and 15 reinforcements killed in a claymore mine attack that hit their bus en route to the battle. The civilian bus driver also died in the claymore attack, and 2 soldiers were injured. The ground offensive also resulted in 6 officers and 13 troops injured. In addition, a naval skirmish took place in the eastern district of Trincomalee, and at COB local time August 1, the China Bay naval base near Trincomalee faced attacks by the LTTE. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Sri Lankan Army (SLA) troops continued to battle Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres on the ground in Mavil Aru, in the eastern district of Batticaloa, August [1](#)1. The SLA is attempting to gain control of a water sluice, blocked by the LTTE since July 20, that normally provides irrigation to 30,000 acres of rice fields and drinking water for 15,000 families (reftels). DAO FSN reported that July 31 also saw a brief exchange of mortar fire between the SLA and the LTTE in Nagar Kovil, in the northern peninsula of Jaffna. There were no air strikes in the north, but reportedly the government conducted air raids over the Mavil Aru area the night of July 31.

[1](#)3. (C) The media broadly reported that Elilan, district LTTE leader from Trincomalee in the east, declared the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) void. However, August 1 newspapers quoted the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) spokesman saying neither the government nor the LTTE had given the requisite 14 days' notice to abrogate the CFA. Government officials have publicly reiterated that the

current military action is based on humanitarian assistance, although weekend air strikes hit southwest of Batticaloa, far removed from the canal in Mavil Aru. In an August 1 meeting with Charge', SLMM head Ulf Henricsson assessed that the government had used the sluice issue as an "excuse" to bomb other LTTE targets.

¶4. (C) Henricsson told Charge' that the LTTE has the advantage in Mavil Aru, with swampy terrain and mined roads creating difficulties for the SLA. Henricsson posited that a government failure might remind officials that a military solution is not feasible. Government troops faced an additional setback when a claymore mine hit a bus carrying reinforcement troops to Mavil Aru the night of July 31. 15 soldiers and the civilian bus driver died in the attack, and 2 soldiers were injured, according to military spokesman Brigadier General Samarasinghe in an August 1 phone conversation with emboff.

¶5. (C) Samarasinghe also told emboff the SLA was roughly 500 meters from the canal and faced less resistance than it had the previous day (July 31), so he expected the SLA would take the water sluice by the end of the day August 1. After a defense briefing later the morning of August 1, Samarasinghe met with PAoff and said that in Mavil Aru, a scratch defense of 400-500 Tigers have staked out an area at an elevation of approximately 40 feet, giving them a visual advantage of 1000 meters. According to Samarasinghe, an air strike on the immediate area of the canal would damage the sluice, possibly causing wide-spread flooding. Samarasinghe said the SLA sought to claim the canal and garrison it with a rifle company in order to keep the Tigers from re-taking it.

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¶6. (C) Later the afternoon of August 1, a naval skirmish ensued in Trincomalee, also in the east. News reports, confirmed by navy spokesman CDR Dassanyake, said the LTTE fired shells at a naval vessel traveling from Palaly to Trincomalee at around 2:30pm local time. A naval contact told pol FSN the ship, carrying 850 security services personnel, successfully repelled the attack and reached Trincomalee harbor. At 4pm local time, poloff, on a demining assessment trip in Minneriya, 2 hours south of Trincomalee, phoned in reports that the LTTE was attacking a naval base at Trincomalee harbor. Poloff heard aircraft overhead, likely conducting ground surveillance. Pro-LTTE website TamilNet reported 8 Sri Lankan Navy personnel killed in the attack, but no other news sources reported any casualties. Two contacts based in Trincomalee said they'd heard reports that up to 5 LTTE boats were sunk. As of COB local time, the LTTE was reportedly conducting attacks on China Bay Naval Base, near Trincomalee, from the LTTE naval installation in Sampur, north of the area.

ENTWISTLE